

December 12, 1951.

Ref. NC-RB-BS

Dr. H. B. Andervont  
National Cancer Institute  
Bethesda 14, Maryland

Dear Dr. Andervont:

I was very much gratified to receive your letter of December 10. About a week ago, I replied in the negative to the formal invitation to the conference, as tendered from the American Cancer Society. If you are agreeable, and have not solicited another speaker, I should like to cancel that negative.

Frankly, the apparent tone of the program had frightened me off. I have not thought about things oncological for some time, and have seen enough speculation by people who, like myself, know very little about cancer that I did not wish to add to the heap. I think that support of fundamental biological research is a necessary part of long term planning in cancer research, but there tends to be a compulsion to premature justification of such work in relation to cancer.

Your letter, and its indication of the speakers you had invited, put an entirely different light on the purposes of this section of the conference, than was indicated in the general program. Microbial genetics very likely can broaden our insight into the kind of biology we need to know to understand cancer, and to suggest working hypotheses for approaches to it, but these applications should be made in the laboratory, and not on a speaker's platform. If, as your letter suggests, I will not be constrained to relate this subject specifically to cancer, I will be pleased to summarize briefly some of our work in bacterial genetics. But this is not to insist that the oncologist will find nothing of interest in it.

Please let me know if you wish me still to submit an advance abstract of intended remarks, as requested for not later than January 15.

With my appreciation for the cordiality and confidence of your letter,

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg  
Associate Professor of Genetics